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Test flows could impact the operation of irrigation pumps like this one along the Missouri River. (Photo submitted)

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Missouri River Test Flows Begin

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' representatives provided information about plans for the Fort Peck test flow during a Missouri River water management meeting held in Poplar on March 28.

In November 2021, the Fort Peck Dam test release EIS Record of Decision was signed. The purpose of the test flows is to evaluate the potential for achieving pallid sturgeon spawning and recruitment on the upper Missouri River.

John Remus, Missouri River Basin Water Management office for the north-western office chief, explained that the new targets for the test flow are 18,000 cubic feet per second in Wolf Point during April/May and 22,500 cfs in Wolf Point during June. Originally, the high amount was 28,000 cfs.

Part of the reason for the shift is to achieve better temperatures, according to officials. Remus noted that this is only a test in order to collect data. If benefits are seen, then officials might use that information to shape another test. He added that officials will monitor fish on both the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers.

To keep stakeholders informed, WebEx meetings are scheduled on a weekly basis on Wednesdays at noon mountain time. There will be a link to the conference on the Corps of Engineers' website. Press releases will also provide information.

If you have any questions, email missouri.water.management@usace.army.mil. Remus said officials will try to give out as much information as they can as soon as they can.

Remus said the Corps is conducting "human consideration monitoring" including aerial photography, physical surveys, cultural resource monitoring, dam safety monitoring and water quality monitoring.

After an irrigator expressed concern about a possible shortage of water near the end of the growing season, Remus said that Fort Peck will end the growing season with less water than normal, but officials will try to store more water during the winter months.

One goal is if something is discovered that can be done positive for the pallid sturgeon, then a longterm solution will be explored.

Remus said another test is unlikely for next year, but the EIS requires that between three and five test flows take place. The next test flow might not occur for 10-15 years. Remus said it's important for everyone to comply with the EIS in order to keep some control of the situation.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is required by the Endangered Species Act to perform three to five test flows from Fort Peck Dam in the next several years. The test water flow amount released from the Fort Peck Dam is anticipated to be less than originally planned, according to U.S. Corps of Engineers' officials.

During a conference call in early March, Joe Bonneau, U.S. Corps of Engineers, said the maximum amount is now planned to be 22,000 cubic feet per second in June. Originally, the high amount was 28,000 cfs. The level will decrease to 8,000 cfs in early July.

Bonneau said the amount will be a flow that occurs naturally about every three to four years. He added that the reduction takes away some of the concerns that stakeholders have expressed.

He told stakeholders on the call that it's a test and not a permanent change in operations.

Eastern Montana farmer Dick Iversen expressed his concern whether growers will have the ability to fix pump sites. He said the work by growers would need to take place in April instead of May when the test flow increases.

"We need to know in advance to fix pump sites," Iversen said.

Also, he raised concerns that when the flow is reduced to 8,000 CFS in early July, the pump sites might need work again. This will be due to the higher flows in May and June that could cause some pump sites to be silted in again. This time of year is tough since the river banks will be saturated and not safe to maneuver



Test flows could impact the operation of irrigation pumps like this one along the Missouri River. (Photo submitted)

the equipment needed to remove silt.

When asked what will be the difference for the pallid sturgeon in 2024 compared to 2023, officials pointed to better control of the timing and providing warmer water conditions.

One of the project's goals of the test is to investigate responses of pallid sturgeon adults and survival of young fish. Officials are looking to find implementation pathways that are sensible and sensitive to the range of concerns expressed.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Missouri River Water Management Division started its weekly virtual meetings on Wednesday, April 24, to keep residents updated on the status of Fort Peck test flows. The call attracted more than 60 participants.

The public can access the meetings, which start at noon (mountain time) on Wednesdays, at <https://usace1.webex.com/usace1/j.php?MTID=ma8b176ff7ce553ae5f1f645f3a8629a4>

During the call on Wednesday, John Remus, Missouri River Basin Water Management office chief, said that the process will begin at Fort Peck Dam on Friday, April 26. Test flows will reach 18,000 cubic feet per second in Wolf Point on Wednesday, May 1, and hold for three days. The amount will then be reduced to 13,000 cfs. He said not much flow is anticipated from the Milk River.

Bonneau, reported that fish monitoring has been going on for about four weeks in order to understand how the fish are doing compared to other years. When asked where the pallid sturgeon are currently located, Bonneau said around Wolf Point or maybe a little above Wolf Point.

Iversen asked if there was a way to have real-time monitoring so people could observe the water levels. Bonneau said he was opened to discuss the possibility.

Roosevelt County resident Dana Berwick said some people have wondered if it would be a challenge to put boats into the river because of the process. Bonneau answered that crews have been able to put boats in the river with similar water flows.

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Ag In The Classroom Held In Sidney



Lambert FFA member Brooke Spinner presents information about wheat during the Ag in the Classroom program held at Sidney High School. (Photo by Bill Vander Weele)



Elementary student Parker Miller shows Sidney FFA teacher Kelly Alvstad a worm during time in the high school's greenhouse. (Photo by Bill Vander Weele)



Students Clara Albin and Annie Allen-Alcazar work with dough during their hands-on experience at Ag in the Classroom. (Photo by Bill Vander Weele)

By Bill Vander Weele

About 300 second and third grade students from throughout Richland County learned valuable information during the Ag in the Classroom program held at Sidney High School on April 18.

"It's to teach the kids about agriculture and show them where their food comes from," Extension agent Marley Voll said of the program's goals.

Organizers of the program included the Extension office, MonDak Stockgrowers, the Sidney Area Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture and area FFA advisors.

Farm Bureau representatives Paula Steinbeisser, Angela Miller and Kirysn Johnson taught students about beef. They had students guess which categories different items belong to between hide and hair, intestines, fats and fatty acids,



Students guess which categories that products belong to during the presentation by Farm Bureau representatives at Sidney High School. (Photo by Bill Vander Weele)

brain, hooves and horns, plasma protein from blood and gelatin from bones.

The other sections that students toured through included wheat, vegetables and dairy.

Instructors were Lambert FFA regarding wheat, Fairview FFA for dairy and Sidney FFA regarding vegetables. Pizza was created through the process and students enjoyed a small piece.

In addition, Sidney agriculture instructor Kelly Alvstad was in the greenhouse to teach students about plants.

Extension agent Josie Evenson said students came from Sidney, Fairview, East Fairview, Savage, Lambert, Horse Creek and a home school for the program.

"We tried to include everybody," Evenson said.

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Teri Antilley Named Director Of Montana 4-H Center For Youth Development

From the MSU News Service

Montana State University Extension has selected Teri Antilley to be the next director of the Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development.

As director, Antilley will provide leadership and establish strategic direction for the center and for all 4-H programs. She will also serve as the state 4-H program leader.

Montana 4-H is the youth development program of MSU Extension. It reaches more than 17,000 youth each year and is supported by more than 3,000 volunteers.

Antilley has served as interim director since January and previously held the position of agriculture and natural resources specialist with MSU Extension. She was chosen for the director position after a national search.

"We are pleased that someone with Dr. Antilley's experience and qualifications will be leading the Montana 4-H Center for Youth Development and serving as our state program leader," said MSU Extension executive director Cody Stone. "Montana 4-H programs support positive youth development across our state, and Dr. Antilley's leadership will be essential to our future."

Antilley said she was honored to accept the position and to see Montana 4-H grow across the state.

"My life goal is to help others succeed," Antilley said. "I am committed to service, lifelong learning and positive youth development."

Antilley said she aims to build a community of support and trust while providing connections, education, resources and skills that empower 4-H members and volunteers.

"I look forward to working across the state and exploring ways to support youth

in college and career readiness," she said.

Antilley was previously an instructor and director of the Texas Tech University Equestrian Center. She was a teacher from 2018 to 2020 and a senior instructor and Extension horse specialist for Pennsylvania State University from 2016 to 2017. She was an Extension program specialist at Texas A&M University from 2006 to 2016.

Antilley has a doctorate in agricultural leadership, education and communications, with an emphasis on Extension education, from Texas A&M University. She also received bachelor's and master's degrees in animal science from Texas A&M.

She succeeds Todd Kesner, who left the position in January.



Teri Antilley. MSU photo by Marcus "Doc" Cravens.

MSGA Brings Producer Profitability

Initiative To Capitol Hill

HELENA – The Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA) spent last week in Washington D.C. meeting with Montana's congressional delegation and other congressional staff sharing the work the Association has been focusing on around Producer Profitability.

"Stockgrowers' trip to Washington D.C. was a success. We would like to thank the Montana delegation for meeting with us and for their interest in the work we have been doing around Producer Profitability," shared Montana Stockgrowers Association President John Grande of Lennep. "From our conversations, there is no doubt that our delegation is ready to fight for Montana ranchers."

President John Grande was joined by First Vice President Lesley Robinson of Dodson, Second Vice President Turk Stovall of Billings, Executive Vice President Raylee Honeycutt, and Government Affairs Specialist Ellie Brighton for the trip. The leadership team from MSGA met with Senator Tester, Senator Daines, Congressman Zinke and staff from Congressman Rosendale's office. The group also had the opportunity to brief staff from the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry and the House Committee on Natural Resources.

Conversations focused on creating a favorable tax climate, ideas for improving government programs, the challenges ranchers are facing regarding securing labor, and minimizing barriers to entry from young or beginning livestock producers.

In addition to congressional meetings, MSGA attended meetings with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

To learn more about the Montana Stockgrowers Association and the organization's work on behalf of Montana ranchers, please visit www.mtbeef.org.

Richland County/MSU Extension Review Programs With Commissioners

By Bill Vander Weele

Richland County/MSU Extension agents provided encouraging information to Richland County Commissioners while reviewing programs during a meeting on April 22.

Extension Agent Josie Evenson provided preliminary numbers for 4-H projects for this year's county fair. She noted there are 240 4-H members in Richland County, which is a 23% increase since she started in the position 10 years ago.

Preliminary amount of entries for the fair include 100 for market beef, 25 for breeding beef, five in dairy, 13 market goats, eight breeding goats, nine dairy goats, 16 market lambs, seven breeding sheep, 78 market swine, 13 breeding swine, 18 horses, 21 for poultry, 19 dogs and 13 cats.

When asked about the success of the 4-H projects participation, Evenson mentioned being in the middle of beef country and area commercial steer opportunities.

"Our community is amazing. That plays into it. Our facility plays into it," Evenson said.

Commissioners approved the request for summer help to help Extension with the fair process.

Evenson took eight teen leaders to a state leadership conference held in Boulder last weekend. Previously, the local teen leaders conducted a food drive and provided 115 meal kits.

She also reported that shooting sports held during the winter at the Event Center were successful, \$7,300 from the Friends of NRA was received to purchase new equipment.

Extension Agent Marley Voll said that Ag in the Classroom held at Sidney High School was very successful with about 300 young students attending to learn about agriculture.

Voll said she and other agents are planning a beef conference to be held in Miles City this fall.

Evenson said that an applicant has been received for the open family consumer science position. The individual will soon be interviewed.

She explained that 10 additional beef dividers are needed in the fair's cattle barn. Commissioners asked her to provide a quote for the purchase.

Consider Using Seed Treatment For Pulse Crops

By Marley Voll
Richland County Extension

Emergence and establishment of your pulse crops can be negatively affected by damping off and root rot pathogens. To avoid these issues, consider using a seed treatment.

Damping off occurs when a fungus or oomycete causes banding and restriction of the developing plant. Examples of these fungus and oomycete include Pythium, Rhizoctonia and Fusarium. Damping off can be worse when the soil is cool and moist around the time the crop is planted. Symptoms of damping off include a reduced stand, girdling, seedling yellowing, reduced secondary roots, and brown to black colored roots.

Different root rots that infect pulse crops will show up early in the year, while others will appear later on as temperatures rise. Factors that intensify root diseases include wet conditions, herbicide injury, temperature, nematodes, and soil characteristics including compacted soils and high clay soils. These issues can cause stress on the root system, limiting its ability to take up water. Symptoms will include browning, crown lesions, poor nodulation, few secondary roots, and constriction. While these symptoms are taking place below ground, above ground foliage may appear to be healthy until pod fill when plants begin to yellow, and the number of pods or head size is reduced.

Seed treatments can assist in suppressing these early season pathogens, especially seed treatments that target Pythium, Rhizoctonia, and Fusarium.

For a list of fungicide suggestions, visit <https://www.montana.edu/extension/plantpath/resources/> and select "Fungicides Seed Treatment Registered for Disease Control in Pea, Lentil, and Chickpea". Recommendations for foliar fungicides that target above ground pulse diseases are also available on the website.

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It's a "Tropical Fairadise" at the McKenzie County Fair June 12 - 15

By Dianne Swanson

Organizers of the McKenzie County Fair in Watford City have planned four days of fun and excitement just for you Wednesday, June 12, through Saturday, June 15. Gates open at 5 p.m. Wednesday evening and 8 a.m. Thursday through Saturday. Admission to the grounds is free. All times are Central Daylight Time.

Start the weekend at 7 p.m. Wednesday evening with the Olaf Leiseth Memorial Draft Horse Show. This free event showcases the hard-working draft horses and their drivers as they navigate an obstacle course, do log sledding, compete in a swamper race and cultivate corn.

Thursday night is Extreme Sports night with Knights and Bikes featuring BMX riders performing aerobatics while jumping up to 75 feet in the air, and Knights of Mayhem performing North Dakota jousting, where riders use sticks to knock each other off their horses. "You won't see this anywhere else," fair board member Christopher Kubal stated. The events run consecutively beginning at 6 p.m.

Then enjoy the music of Chancey Williams in the outdoor arena in front of the grandstand.

Drivers from three different states will converge on the fairgrounds to test their skills in the Demolition Derby, which starts at 7 p.m. on Friday. The Ag Expo will also be selling raffle tickets for a chance to drive a car in the derby. NDRA Rodeo will be the highlight Saturday night starting at 7 p.m. and fireworks will light up the sky at dusk. Professional Rodeo Clown Houston Stuart will be entertaining the crowd all three nights.

4-H and FFA livestock events will take place Thursday, Friday and Saturday mornings, with the Livestock Sale scheduled for 1 p.m. on Friday. Their static exhibits will also be on display throughout the fair.

North Star Amusements is providing the thrills and chills of the carnival this year and be sure to catch the magic of Adam the Great as he strolls the grounds. A hypnotist and escape artist will also be performing on stage throughout the day. Test your rodeo skills on the mechanical bull and enjoy live music each night.

Children of all ages will love the Kids Zone featuring a petting zoo, grain pit, bubble tower, laser tag and more.



Houston Stuart will be one of the many exciting attractions at this year's McKenzie County Fair.

Stockgrowers To Celebrate 140 Years At Meeting

The Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA) invites ranchers to attend the 140th MidYear Meeting slated for May 28-30, in Miles City at the Custer County Event Center.

The MidYear Meeting is one of two meetings held by MSGA to set policy that guides the Association through the year. While the main focus of the meeting is for the setting of interim policy, the meeting is also used as a networking opportunity for MSGA members and Montana's livestock industry.

This year, attendees will be the first to see results from MSGA's Producer Profitability Initiative listening sessions. Learn what ranchers are saying across Montana regarding the challenges they are facing and ideas attendees have shared to make their businesses more profitable. MSGA will also be sharing priorities and action items that have been developed based on listening session feedback.

An update will be provided by the 2024 NCBA President, Mark Eisele, on the federal work NCBA is doing on behalf of ranch families. Eisele, who ranches in Wyoming, knows first hand the challenges that ranchers in the western United States face. He will recap the work NCBA is doing on endangered species, federal land management, and the farm bill.

As part of MSGA's exclusive member benefit, the MSGA Ranch Weather Radar, Meteorologist Brian Bledsoe will present weather modeling and forecasting for the upcoming summer season and beyond.

To help celebrate the rich history and 140th anniversary of MSGA, Amorette Allison, a local Miles City historian, will provide an oral history of MSGA and its birthplace on Thursday morning during the Coffee Talks session.

Continued on page 12

DAWSON & McCONE COUNTY LAND AUCTION

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Three Buttes 4-H Club Donates To Food Bank



Pictured is Candy Markwald (left) and Brynn Spinner.

By Bill Vander Weele

A member of the Three Buttes 4-H Club assisted the Richland County Food Bank by donating a pig to help feed area people in need.

Brynn Spinner, an eighth-grade student in Lambert, made the donation of a little over 100 pounds of ground pork last week. Spinner explained that she donated her back-up pig to Lambert School and six more pigs were born.

"The whole donation is a lovely donation," Candy Markwald, Richland County Food Bank, said. "It's a huge blessing to use, and the fact that there's no cost for us." Big Sky Butcher, Glendive, donated their processing services.

The food bank remains very busy. On Monday, April 22, the food bank serviced 17 families, which included a total of 38 adults and nine children. During that day, more than 1,200 pounds of food was provided.

Extension Plans Meeting For Farmer's Market

By Marley Voll
Richland County Extension

MSU Richland County Extension will be hosting an organizational meeting for this year's Richland County Farmer's Market on Tuesday, May 14, at 5:30 p.m. at the MSU Richland County Extension Office, Sidney.

If you are a past vendor or are interested in becoming a vendor, you are encouraged to attend this open meeting. Market vendors can sell a variety of products; ranging from handmade items to produce, baked goods, and more.

The organizational details, applications, and safety regulations of food sales at the Richland County Farmer's Market will be discussed at this meeting. Call 406-433-1206 if you have any questions.



MOBILE FRIENDLY

Sidney Receives Grant To Record Sugar Beet History

The Foundation for Montana History announced its largest ever grant making cycle last week, awarding over \$240,000 to communities across Montana, including Sidney.

The foundation is a nonprofit based in Helena that raises funds and makes grants for community-based history initiatives. Since starting the grant program in 2012, they have placed over \$1.7 million into history and preservation projects.

"Working with communities to save and share history is the core of our mission," says foundation president/ CEO Charlene Porsild. "Topping our funding total from previous years is testament to the generosity of our donors across the country who support preservation of Montana's rich and enduring past."

The foundation grants up to \$10,000 per project. This year, funding supports projects from Carter to Lake counties and includes a first time foundation grant recipient in Treasure County.

Four funded projects include:

•MonDak Heritage Center, "Sidney Sugar Beet Industry Oral History", Sidney, \$4,900: The MonDak Heritage Center will capture the stories and experiences of former workers and farmers associated with the recently closed sugar beet factory in Sidney. Results will be shared on the Montana History Portal. Learn more about the organization at <https://mondakheritagecenter.org>.

•Treasure County 89ers, "Yucca Theatre Pillar Dome Repair", Hysham, \$10,000: The Treasure County 89ers will repair eight pillar domes at the Yucca Theatre to prevent further water damage to the historic structure. Learn more about this structure at <https://historicmt.org/items/show/2125>.

•Bigfork Art & Cultural Center, "Building an Interactive Display", Bigfork, \$10,000: The Bigfork Art & Cultural Center will make an interactive permanent exhibit showcasing their underwater discoveries during archeological surveys in the vast waterways of northwest Montana. Learn more about the organization at <https://baccbigfork.org>.

•Butte-Silver Bow Archives, "Business of Burials," Butte, \$5,900: The Butte-Silver Bow Archives will host tours, produce historic booklets, and create an exhibition on four Butte cemeteries. Tour participants will also learn about D/2 Biological Solution and tools to support tombstone conservation. Learn more about the organization at <https://buttearchives.org>.

"Keeping [the Yucca Theatre] looking good and in condition for use as a public facility is our quest," says the 89ers Museum Board, Hysham. "We appreciate so much The Foundation for Montana History's interest in helping us! [This grant is] a big boost to our spirits and to the timeline of [work on] the Yucca Theatre restoration!"

The Foundation for Montana History is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity raising money for history and preservation projects across Montana. You can see a complete list of 2024 grantees at <https://www.mthistory.org/>.

Montana Spring Wheat Variety Performance Evaluations Released

By Marley Voll, MSU Richland County Extension Agent

Montana State University has released their 2023 Montana Spring Wheat Performance Evaluations. These trials are based on wheat variety performance in multiple locations across the state through multiple years. This performance summary compares agronomic characteristics of spring wheat varieties evaluated by Montana Agricultural Experiment Stations and other varieties commonly grown in the state. The trials take place in 11 locations across the state and region, which locally include Sidney (irrigated and dryland) and just across the border in Williston (NDSU, dryland). This data is aimed to help farmers select the variety which performs the best in their area and growing conditions.

A list of quick facts that summaries the results and gives descriptions of the varieties can be found at <https://plantsciences.montana.edu/foundationseed/quickfacts/> while a full report can be found at <https://plantsciences.montana.edu/crops/index.html> or by stopping into the Richland County Extension Office.



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Ag Loan Officer



Ten Montana State Research Projects Receive Support from Montana Fertilizer Advisory Committee

BOZEMAN – Ten agricultural research projects in the Montana State University College of Agriculture received support from the Montana Fertilizer Advisory Committee last month, seeking to advance knowledge around cropping systems, environmental preservation, water management and more.

Each year, the seven-member Montana Fertilizer Advisory Committee disburses funds collected through an assessment on commercial fertilizers.

The assessment was approved by the Montana Legislature to support research and education focused on soil fertility and management. The committee is made up of agricultural producers and includes representatives from the College of Agriculture and MSU Extension.

“This year’s proposals were well received by the committee, and it was very competitive,” said Darrin Boss, Montana Agricultural Experiment Station associate director and assistant dean for research in the College of Agriculture. “The desire to support producers by generating research made possible through the fertilizer assessment was wonderful to see. I want to thank the volunteer committee who did a stellar job throughout the review and selection process.”

This year’s MFAC funding totals just under \$394,000 and will support more than two dozen MSU faculty and graduate students from the Department of Animal and Range Sciences, Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences, Department of Plant Sciences and Plant Pathology and Department of Research Centers. A full list of the funded projects is below.

“Fertility Management for Optimum Yield and Quality of Soy and Dry Beans in Eastern Montana” – This research will generate information on fertility management for soy and dry beans, including variety selection, to fill a current void in recommendations for Montana producers.

“Testing Dibutylidithiophosphate as a Seed Treatment to Boost Plant Growth Without Increasing Fertilizer Use” – This project will develop a DBDTP seed treatment to boost yield for Montana growers without increasing fertilizer use, with the potential for new product development.

“Research Analytical Chemist, Environmental Analytical Laboratory” – This project will partially fund a scientist in a shared laboratory that conducts research and education related to agriculture and environmental health, providing guidance to both undergraduate and graduate students and resulting in educational outcomes that broadly benefit Montana.

“Examining the Impact of Physiological Leaf Spot in Winter Wheat and the Role of Chloride in Reducing Symptoms” – This research will evaluate the effect of physiological leaf spot on grain yield in winter wheat and determine the impact of chloride fertilizer treatments on those symptoms, as well as on grain yield, test weight and protein content.

“Sulfur Source and Rate Effects on Yield and Quality of Wheat, Pea and Canola” – This project will address a lack of research into sulfur’s role in soil fertility

and establish critical sulfur levels to guide producers on whether to fertilize with sulfur – and if so, how much to use.

“pH Remediation by Perennial Forages Following 18 Years of Nitrogen Management in Alternative Crop Rotations” – This research will provide a baseline for productivity and quality of alfalfa, grass and mixed perennial forage. It will identify how perennial forage systems stabilize pH or reverse pH decline and which systems are most effective.

“Winter Canola Seeding Date and Fertilizer Application Timing in Montana” – This project will identify optimal seeding dates and fertilizer practices for canola to help the crop establish and overwinter. A multi-site experiment will explore planting dates and application timing of nitrogen and sulfur fertilizers.

“Relationship Between Fertility and Water Management, Production and Quality of Advanced Spring Forage, Feed and Malt Barley Lines” – This project will seek to determine the optimum levels of nitrogen for new forage, feed and malt barley lines and will examine the impacts of different genes on both nitrogen use and grain protein content.

“Assessing Sulfur Fertilization as a Means to Improve Statewide Forage Quality and Value by Reducing Nitrate Accumulations in Cereal Forages” – This work will aim to better understand the role of sulfur in how forage barley accumulates nitrate, filling a key gap for maximizing forage quality for grazing livestock.

“Quantifying Nitrogen Leaching in Irrigated Fields” – This project will deepen knowledge of when producers should apply nitrogen fertilizer and water for minimal nitrogen leaching with the goal of refining recommendations. The project will aim to save producers money on agricultural inputs while protecting surrounding environments from harms from excessive nitrogen leaching.

More information about the Montana Fertilizer Advisory Committee can be found at ag.montana.edu/mfac.

Stockgrowers To Celebrate...

Continued from page 9.

The Montana Stockgrowers Foundation (MSF) invites MidYear attendees and the Miles City community to attend their annual fundraiser, the Sunset Banquet on Wednesday, May 29. The event brings together livestock industry professionals and the local community for a night of entertainment and fundraising to support MSF’s mission of investing in Montana’s ranching communities through education, leadership, and conservation.

Sunset Banquet tickets are available to the public and can be purchased with a MidYear Meeting registration or separately through the online registration platform. Tickets include dinner, live music by Kyle Shobe and the Walk ‘Em Boys, games, and a silent and live auction.

The Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Lab will also be celebrating its 100th anniversary at the end of MSGA’s MidYear Meeting. Attendees are invited to join the centennial celebration which includes field tours and a celebration banquet on May 30. MidYear attendees can register online for these events at no additional cost.

Registration is now open online at www.mtbeef.org/msga-events. Pre-registration is encouraged. On-site registration will be available at the event.

For more information about MSGA’s 2024 MidYear Meeting, contact MSGA’s office at 406-442-3420 or visit www.mtbeef.org.



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Proper Timing Of Pasture Turnout Critical For Optimal Forage Production

Grazing too early will reduce plant vigor, thin existing stands, lower total forage production, and increase disease, insect and weed infestations.

By NDSU Agriculture Communication

Ranchers depend on grass as a primary source of forage, whether it be rangeland, pasture or hay. While they carefully select species to plant as cover crops or plan a total mixed ration, many ranchers do not know the primary grass species their livestock consume.

“Knowing the predominant grass species is important because not all grass is equal,” says Kevin Sedivec, North Dakota State University Extension rangeland management specialist. “Different species have different growth patterns and nutritional content. Thus, the optimal time to graze these resources varies. To achieve optimal forage and livestock production, plan your grazing system around the type of grazing resources available.”

Native grasslands consist of a mixture of cool- and warm-season grasses. Native cool-season grasses begin growing once the average temperature is 32 degrees or greater for five consecutive days, whereas warm-season grasses start growing once the average temperature is 40 degrees or greater for five consecutive days. This results in approximately a one-month difference in when these plants reach grazing readiness.

Pasture, on the other hand, typically consists of cool-season grasses in the northern regions of the United States, and warm-season grasses in the southern regions. Cool-season grasses exhibit rapid growth and need less growing degree days to reach grazing readiness in the spring. This extends the grazing season by enabling ranchers to turn cattle out to pasture earlier in the spring, Sedivec says.

Irrelevant of grass species, grazing before plants reach the appropriate stage of growth for grazing readiness causes a reduction in herbage production by as much as 60%, which can reduce carrying capacity (number of livestock or length of grazing season) and animal performance. Grazing readiness for most domesticated pasture is at the 3-leaf stage, whereas grazing readiness for most native range grasses is the 3½-leaf stage.

“Drought or poor grazing management can further delay grazing readiness of grasses and reduce subsequent forage production,” says Miranda Meehan, Extension livestock environmental stewardship specialist. “This is especially true for cool-season grasses, which develop tillers in the fall. The development of these tillers has a direct impact on plant growth the next growing season.”

NDSU Extension has found heavy grazing use of more than 80% in the fall can reduce forage production of cool-season dominated rangeland and pasture by over 50% the following grazing season.

If livestock grazed tillers of cool-season grasses below the bottom two leaves in the fall, the tillers likely did not survive the winter, Meehan says. If they do survive the winter, plant vigor (health) is low and forage production reduced. Drought stress also affects the survival of fall tillers. Fall droughts either don't allow buds to come out of dormancy, thus preventing new tiller growth, or cause death to those tillers that did grow. If tillers do not establish or survive the winter, a delay in growth and development will occur the following growing season because new



Grazing too early may reduce plant vigor, thin existing stands, lower total forage production, and increase disease, insect and weed infestations. (NDSU photo)

tillers will need to develop in the spring. This loss of fall tillers can create a delay in grazing readiness the following spring by 10 to 14 days. When drought and poor grazing management in the fall occur simultaneously, grazing readiness can be delayed even longer.

“Drought-stressed pastures will require special care this spring to help them recover,” Meehan says. “These pastures must be given adequate time to recover. Grazing too early will reduce plant vigor, thin existing stands, lower total forage production, and increase disease, insect and weed infestations. Pastures and range damaged by grazing too early may take several years of deferment or even rest before the stand regains productivity.”

NDSU Extension specialists observed as much as a three-week delay in grazing readiness for introduced cool-season species and a four-week delay for native cool-season species following drought.

Consider these grazing management strategies to optimize forage production and livestock performance:

- Determine the predominate grass species in your pasture and rangeland.
- Monitor grazing readiness of predominate grass species and delay grazing

start date until these species reach grazing readiness. For more information refer to the NDSU Extension grazing readiness resources: ag/grazing2024.

- Monitor grazing use throughout the grazing season.

Depending on your forage resources and growing season conditions, it can be difficult to delay grazing until grasses reach grazing readiness. Meehan and Sedivec recommend the following strategies, depending on the resources available:

- Start grazing annual forages, such as winter cereals, or domestic cool-season pastures, which will reach grazing readiness earlier in the spring.
- Provide supplemental forage to livestock on domesticated pasture or hay land. However, be careful not to graze your hay lands too early, too short, or if muddy, as stands will be dramatically reduced in forage production due to reduced vigor and plant damage, leading to new infestations of weeds.
- Continue dry lot feeding in May.
- If grazing cannot be delayed, minimize the impact to a small area of your pastures or in one of your cells. Then rest that cell or area the remainder of the grazing season and defer from grazing the next year (no spring grazing).

"While it may be tempting to start grazing early due to a lack of forage resources, it can have long-term impacts on forage production and plant health," Sedivec says. "Remember, it takes grass leaves to replenish the root food reserves needed to grow grass. Early spring grazing, especially following a drought, can be costly in terms of total forage production during the entire grazing season."

As the grazing season progresses, NDSU Extension specialists recommend monitoring the degree of use to prevent negative impacts to developing tillers, especially in the fall. The recommended utilization level for proper use of grasslands is 40-60%, with some native grasses species only tolerating 40-50% use. At this level, rangeland utilization is fairly uniform, with 65-80% of the height of desirable forage species being grazed. Remove livestock when this level is exceeded.

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Montana Farm Bureau Summer Conference June 10-12 In Miles City

The Montana Farm Bureau Summer Conference is set for June 10-12 in the historic cow town of Miles City. The summer conference provides an opportunity for the organization's advisory committees to discuss current agricultural issues and concerns, and surface ideas for policy development. Events take place at the Custer County Events Center and the MCC Ag Advancement Center.

"Members from across the state are excited to attend our annual summer committee meetings and foundation fund raiser. It's been over 10 years since Montana Farm Bureau hosted a statewide meeting from the beautiful eastern side of the state," said MFBF president Cyndi Johnson. "There's no shortage of policy topics again this year as we continue to fight for private property rights, strong rural communities and accurate agricultural education. Now is a great opportunity to join your local Farm Bureau Federation and get involved."

"The Farm Babe" To Speak at Farm To Table Event

The Williston Area Chamber of Commerce and the Williams County Soil Conservation District are presenting a Farm to Table Event on Wednesday, June 19, from 5:30-8:30 p.m. at the Williams County SCD Tree Shed.

The Farm to Table dinner is an opportunity to bring the agriculture industry and the community together to engage, learn and eat a quality meal.

The dinner offers the public an interactive way to learn about the expansive agriculture industry around them and the importance of those fields and pastures that span the region.

Michelle Miller, known as "The Farm Babe", will serve as the event's keynote speaker. Miller is a myth buster in the food industry as she brings unbiased information from farmers and leading industry experts to audiences nationwide.

Miller brings the unique perspective as a big city globetrotter turned farm girl, and she plants the seed inside the minds of those looking to understand the truth about modern agricultural production. She has been on stage among leading industry experts as one of the most well known voices in agriculture.

You can purchase tickets for the event by going to: <https://www.willistonchamber.com/farm-to-table>

38th Annual Dakota Cowboy Poetry Gathering May 25-26

The 36th Annual Dakota Cowboy Poetry Gathering will be happening at Medora Community Center, Medora, ND on Saturday, May 25 and Sunday, May 26. Everyone is welcome to attend.

On Saturday, May 26 registration is at 9 a.m. with a celebration from 10-11 a.m. for "Ask A Cowgirl Poet", and a program from 1-4:30 p.m. The night show starts at 7:30 p.m. featuring Betty Lynne McCarthy, Buffalo, MO; Dorothy Vincent, Felton, MN; Carson Houser, McClusky, ND; and Jan Schiferl, Fordyce, NB; with Emcee Bill Lowan, Sentinel Butte, ND.

On Sunday, May 26 there will be Cowboy Gospel singing, 9-11 a.m., and a program from 1-4:30 p.m. The night show starts at 7:30 p.m. featuring George Ray Russell, Boulder, CO; Beni Paulson, Richardton, ND; Karen Stockett, Fallon, MT; and Kurt Rockeman, Great Falls, MT; with Emcee Patti Burian Ingman, Killdeer, ND.

For more information contact Bill Lowman 701-872-4746.

The conference begins with Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R) Day, June 10. Morning tours include Wandering Acres flower farm and Cowboy Meats in Forsyth and an afternoon YF&R Committee meeting. The MFBF Women's Leadership Committee (WLC) meets Monday afternoon and MFBF's ACE Leadership Seminar is also planned for Monday.

On Tuesday, keynote speakers include national ag advocate Brandi Buzzard and Clayton Phipps, the "Cowboy Dino". Buzzard, a cowgirl, rancher and advocate, will share how she seized the moment to stand up for agriculture by engaging global food companies, the press, policy makers and more, while using trust as her driving force. Phipps, Garfield County, will talk about "Montana's Dueling Dinosaurs". Phipps discovered the dinosaurs in 2006 and will provide a compelling look at finding dinosaurs on range land.

Nine issues advisory committees will meet Tuesday to hear informative speakers on pertinent topics and discuss potential policy to take back to their county Farm Bureaus. Tara Mastel, Montana State University Extension, will provide an interesting workshop on new residents in Montana titled, "Who Are They and Why Are They Coming?"

The MFB Foundation will hold a western-themed "Foundation Round-up" fundraising dinner Tuesday evening. The event features an MFBF district basket auction and other entertaining fundraising activities benefitting the MFB Foundation with its mission to support agriculture education, research and community support.

Wednesday's Miles City-based agricultural-themed tours include Muggli Brothers Pellet Plant, Tongue River Winery and Range Riders Museum. Also on tap for that day is the Annual Foundation Golf Tournament at the Miles City Town and Country Club.

To register online visit mfbf.org. Reservations for the Sleep Inn must be made by May 8, and registration is due by May 30. Questions? Call the MFBF office at 406-587-3153 or email info@mfbf.org.

MDA Student Loan Assistance Program Accepting Applications

The Montana Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Student Loan Assistance Program is now accepting applications. Established during the 2019 legislative session, this program provides student loan assistance to Montana's college-educated youth pursuing careers in farming or ranching.

"The Student Loan Assistance Program seeks to relieve the financial stress facing our young producers so that they can focus their energies on raising some of the world's highest quality commodities and carrying forward Montana's agricultural traditions," said MDA director Christy Clark. "And when we can keep a family ranch in family hands, that is a success for Montana agriculture."

Qualified farmers and ranchers are eligible for student loan assistance through the program for up to five years. Applicants must be a Montana resident designated as the primary owner, heir, successor or assignee of a farm or ranch in Montana that obtained their associated or baccalaureate degree(s) from a Montana college or university and have agreed to operate their farm or ranch for at least five years.

Applications are due June 3, and can be submitted through WebGrants. Full program guidelines are available on the department's website at agr.mt.gov/Student-Loan-Assistance-Program.

The Montana Department of Agriculture is serving Montana Agriculture and growing prosperity under the Big Sky. For more information on department programs and services, visit agr.mt.gov.

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DPHHS Officials Encourage Safe Handling Of Live Poultry

Submitted by Jon Ebelt, Communications Director, DPHHS

State health officials are raising awareness about the health risks associated with raising backyard birds.

Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) epidemiologist Rachel Hinnenkamp said that while raising backyard birds has become an increasingly popular activity in the state, there are health risks to be aware of.

She said live poultry can carry germs such as Salmonella and Campylobacter, which can cause humans to get sick with symptoms including diarrhea, stomach pain, fever, and sometimes vomiting.

“Healthy poultry, including chicks and ducklings, can carry and shed bacteria such as Salmonella or Campylobacter without showing any signs of disease,” Hinnenkamp said. It’s important to remember to wash your hands after contact with live poultry and follow the other safe handling practices described below.

In 2023, there was a multi-state outbreak of Salmonella cases linked to live poultry, with 1,072 illnesses reported across the country, including 247 hospitalizations. That same year, there were 72 salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis

cases in Montana reporting contact with live poultry before their illness started.

Additionally, outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI, or bird flu) have continued to sicken bird populations across the world, including in the US and Montana. HPAI causes severe disease and high mortality rates among domestic birds such as chickens and turkeys.

“The risk to human health is currently very low, but if you develop flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, cough, sore throat, body aches, or shortness of breath within 10 days of contact with a sick or dead bird, contact your health care provider and inform them of your symptoms and recent exposure,” DPHHS epidemiologist Devon Cozart said.

Raising your own flock can be a rewarding and fun experience that should include safe handling practices to decrease risk of disease in humans. DPHHS, the Department of Livestock (DOL), and Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) officials encourage safe handling of backyard poultry to prevent potential human illness by using these simple prevention measures:

- Always wash your hands with soap and water right after handling eggs, backyard poultry, or anything in their environment
- Avoid touching dead, injured, or sick backyard poultry
- Supervise children around poultry, and make sure they wash their hands after contact
- Avoid eating or drinking in areas where poultry live or roam
- Avoid kissing or snuggling your birds
- Keep chicks and ducks outside of the home
- Set aside a pair of shoes to wear while taking care of backyard birds, and keep those shoes outside of the house
- If you must handle a wild bird or sick or dead poultry, take protective measures. Do not handle the animal with bare skin. Wear gloves while handling animals and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact. Respiratory protection (such as a facemask) and eye protection (such as goggles) are also highly recommended. Severe illness in backyard birds should be reported to DOL at 406-444-1976. Sick or dead wild birds can be reported to your local FWP office, or the FWP wildlife health program in Bozeman at 406-577-7882.

“These prevention measures can help to keep you and your family safe while enjoying the many benefits of raising animals,” said State Veterinarian Dr. Tahnee Szymanski.

Please visit DPHHS website for more information on general backyard safety tips, and <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022/2022-hpai-commercial-backyard-flocks> for more information on avian influenza in the U.S. and Montana.



Stock photo

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4. **WATER CONDUCTS ELECTRICITY**, so be careful when irrigating near power lines.
5. Keep yourself and machinery **AT LEAST 10 FEET AWAY** from overhead power lines.
6. Be extra careful when operating sprayers, planters, and cultivators. **KNOW THE HEIGHT AND WIDTH OF YOUR FARM EQUIPMENT** to prevent accidental contact.

WHAT TO DO

IF YOU CONTACT A POWER LINE:

If a power line falls across or near your machinery while you are in it, stay inside and **CALL 911**. Tell bystanders to stay away. If you must exit, jump as far as possible so no part of your body is touching the machinery when you land. **KEEP BOTH FEET TOGETHER** and shuffle or hop at least 40 feet away.

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Making The Switch: Adopting Stripper Header & Disc Drill

BOZEMAN – The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) interviewed six dryland grain producers to compare the ownership and operation costs of disc drills and stripper headers with hoe drills and auger/drapper headers. According to the NRCS economic report, switching to a stripper header and disc drill from a draper header and hoe drill resulted in an average savings of \$4.40 per acre/year for the six producers interviewed in this study.

While the initial investment is substantial, all producers interviewed believed that both the economic and soil health benefits were worth the equipment investment in the long-term. All six producers saved money with decreased fuel, maintenance, and labor inputs. Each farmer implements a different management system in a different area of Montana from Sunburst to Broadview and Plentywood to Columbus.

In addition to calculated cost savings, these farmers realized multiple soil health benefits that were not monetized in this analysis. Each producer spoke of the value of saving soil moisture and the ability to grow crops more often while decreasing fallow. Keeping the soil covered with tall stubble from the stripper header and minimizing soil disturbance with a disc drill are two key components of a healthy dryland crop system that will build both economic and environmental resilience for future generations.

A video and the Economics of Stripper Header and Disc Drill Adoption report highlighting the findings and interviews are available now on the NRCS website at nrcs.usda.gov/montana/soilhealth.

Dryland grain production is the dominant crop system in Montana, with 5.5 million acres in wheat cultivation, primarily in the Golden Triangle of central Montana and the Platinum Rectangle of northeast Montana. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most dryland producers in

these regions use a hoe drill for seeding and an auger or draper header for small grain harvest.

Disc drills and stripper headers offer a solution to the problems caused by hoe drills and low harvest heights. Single- and double-disc drills have the least soil disturbance of all drill types, and the design configuration allows for seeding into tall standing stubble, as there is no shank for residue to plug on. As a result, farmers with disc drills can leave standing stubble much taller at harvest. This tall stubble protects against erosion and creates a micro-climate that reduces soil water evaporation. While both auger and draper headers can harvest at heights of 10 to 12 inches or more, the stripper header leaves stubble even taller by only stripping off the grain head and leaving 90% of the residue standing and vertical. Paired together, disc drills and stripper headers are the best machinery combination for conserving soil and water and increasing soil health in dryland small grain rotations.

Contact the local NRCS field office for more information about conservation harvest management, soil health, and other conservation topics.

April 1-7, was the inaugural Montana Soil Health Week! Join us in celebrating to help raise awareness about how healthy soils can increase crop yields, create greater climate resiliency, improve nutrition, and strengthen food security. Visit Montana Association of Conservation Districts Soil Health Week webpage at montanasoilhealthweek.macdnet.org or visit the NRCS website at nrcs.usda.gov/montana/soilhealth.



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